

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Analysis of data collected from the study parks reveals that the parks made a considerable economic contribution to North Carolina's economy. As shown in Table 3, every park surveyed contributed a number of jobs and had considerable impact on the personal income of local residents. The state's investment in the form of an operating budget went to the cost of salaries and support services. *An investment by the state in the form of operating budgets provides a substantial return for the community.* For example, Hanging Rock State Park had a net operating budget of \$414,649 that along with the expenditures of the primary use, non-local visitors generated 46.7 jobs and \$1,171,648 in household income for Stokes County residents. For the state, this amounts to a cost of \$8,879.01 per job ($\$414,649/46.7$) and a leverage ratio of 1:2.8 ($\$1,171,648/\$414,649$), meaning that for each state dollar invested in net operating cost at Hanging Rock State Park, \$2.80 is generated in resident income. The leverage ratio for the parks ranged from 1:1.8 for Eno River State Park to 1:25.1 for Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.

The overall economic impact generated by the direct expenditures of the primary purpose, non-local visitors to the 14 study sites includes \$124,825,681 in sales, \$46,333,014 in local income and 2,119.8 jobs. The 14 park operating budgets generated \$15,764,907 in sales, \$10,004,898 in local income and 256.9 jobs. (Table 4)

As Walker, Lee & Crompton (2005) noted in their study of the economic impact of Texas state parks, the economic contribution of a park rides not only on the simple provision of a facility, but on the services and amenities they provide. Investments by the state in both the physical upkeep of a park as well as programs and services for park visitors will likely lead to increased visitation in the form of return users, new users, and more expenditures per visitor. The ripple effect of such investment would eventually lead to higher revenues to the state in the form of sales taxes, as well as more jobs and income to residents in the park's host counties.

Study Limitations

Logistical and methodological limitations of this study exist and must be disclosed. The first of these limitations involves the timing of this study. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita posed resource obstacles to the administration of the survey to North Carolina parks. During the weekends of September 3rd and September 10th – Labor Day weekend and the following weekend – all travel by state employees was restricted to essential travel only. This restriction included travel for research by employees of publicly owned universities. Travel restrictions were relaxed on September 15, 2005 by North Carolina State University to allow all activities associated with the University's mission to continue (research activity falls under this umbrella). Study research resumed the following weekend. Weather impacted survey distribution at another time as well: all parks east of the I-95 corridor were closed the weekend of September 17th to prepare for landfall of Hurricane Ophelia, an action that impacted survey collection at five of the fifteen study parks.

Table 4. Economic Activity Associated with the 14 State Parks, In-County Expenditures

	# Visitors	Direct Expenditures	Impact on Sales	Impact on North Carolina Residents' Income	Number of Jobs Generated
Primary Purpose Visitors	3,388,531	\$79,825,681	\$124,120,529	\$46,333,014	2,119.8
Park Operating Budget		\$9,667,700	\$15,764,907	\$10,004,898	256.9
Total:	3,388,531	\$89,493,381.38	\$139,885,436	\$56,337,912	2,376